For Raters and Senior Raters

How to Write Effective and Appropriate Evaluation Narratives

for OERs

Purpose

To provide practical guidance and advice to rating officials on writing effective and appropriate narratives for Officer Evaluation Reports (OER).

The information in this briefing should not be perceived as definitive guidance on writing narratives that would guarantee an officer's selection for promotion. It is simply provided as an informal guide to assist rating officials in conveying to selection boards their assessment of the rated officer's performance and potential.

Evaluation System (Goals)

Why the Narrative is so important . . .

- Provide selection boards and personnel managers adequate information to make their decisions.

- Allow for field impact on the selection of future leaders.
  - Opportunity to advance the “Best”
  - Establish Senior Rater Accountability
  - Confidence that others cannot inflate
  - Narratives focus on Quantitative Performance & Potential

- Enhance Leader Development
  - Focus on Officer Development at Company Grade Level
  - Basis in Army Values, Doctrine & Leadership
  - Emphasis on Counseling
  - Link with OPMS

- Link Performance to Mission

Recent Board Trends - OER Narratives

- The best rater and senior rater narratives:
  - ✓ Are short; tell a simple story about the quality of officer being evaluated; focus on potential 3-5 years out (promotions, command, school, & assignments.)
  - ✓Quantify officer's value relative to peers and do so in concert with senior rater box check. Critical for "no box check" OERs.
- Many OER narratives are internally inconsistent:
  - ✓ Quantifying (e.g. "top 2% of my captains") with a small population.
  - ✓ Stating "the best ever"; having 10 in the population, 50 in the profile and a COM label.
- Some phrases and clichés are counterproductive or overused. Examples:
  - ✓ Stellar, hit the ground running.

Rater Narrative

Focus on specific, quantifiable performance –

- *What an officer did and how well*
- *Quantify and Qualify Performance and Potential*

- The rater is the first individual to write a narrative on the reverse side of an OER.
- Narrative should explain what the rated officer did and how well he/she did it.
- A laundry list of superlatives is not helpful to selection boards – more is not necessarily better.
- Selection board members do use the rater's narrative in their file deliberations; more intensely when they are looking for in-depth information about a rated officer's performance and potential.
- When there is no senior rater (due normally to lack of rating official qualifications) the rater's narrative is the one which provides the input on both performance and potential.
- Block Vc.
  - Must include specific comments concerning rated officer potential
  - Emphasize potential for the near term (next 3-5 years: command, assignment, school and promotion)
- Block Vd. – Ensure that you list any skill sets or professional qualifications that might be useful to future functional designation boards.

Senior Rater Narrative

Should quantify and qualify the passion (or lack thereof) that senior rater has for rated officer's performance and potential.

- Selection boards should understand what input the Senior Rater is providing without having to guess.
- There are no "magic" or "buzz" words to convey Senior Rater intent.
- Focus on potential (3 to 5 years; command, assignment, schooling and promotion).
- Cannot mention Box Check in the narrative (i.e., "ACOM Officer", "If my profile allowed, I would rate this officer higher.")
- Avoid Disconnect with Box Check
  - Example: Large population, COM Box Check, but Exclusive Narrative
  - Exceptions: Immature profiles, Back to Back reports
- Be careful with your narrative – ***don't say the same thing for all your people (Boards can easily detect repeated verbiage)***

No Comparison Box Check in VIIb

For reports that do not require a box check Part VII.b. (CPTs, LTs, WO1s, and CW2s):

- The narrative (along with the remaining information in Section VII) is what primarily conveys Senior Rater intent.
- Senior Raters should use quantified and qualified statements within narrative.
- The word picture discerned from the narrative should inform selection board members as to the Senior Rater's assessment of that officer's performance and potential.

Senior Rating - Consistency

Recommendations:

• **Senior raters need to amplify their Potential box checks by using the narrative to clearly send the appropriate message to selection boards**. The following classification of types of narratives may serve as a guide and assist in sending a clear message:

- **Exclusive narratives**. Those which clearly describe superior performance/potential above that of the vast majority, associated with early promotion and are restrictive in nature (e.g. top 1%, 3%, 5%, etc. of all officers, the best among a select grade or group, promote below the zone).

Should only be used:

- **for the best ACOM reports within a mature profile**
- **for COM reports that follow an ACOM for same rated officer**
- **with discretion, for the very best officers with COM reports in small population/immature profile situations**

- **Strong narratives**. Those which describe significant performance accomplishments and enthusiastically recommend promotion, assignment to key duty positions linked to upward mobility and appropriate military schooling (e.g. among the best, easily in the top third of the officer corps, definitely promote this officer, below the zone potential, one of my best officers).

Should be used:

- **for ACOM reports**
- **for <u>the</u> <u>very</u> <u>best</u> <u>officers</u> <u>receiving</u> <u>COM reports</u>**

Senior Rater Narrative Tips

Be careful with your narrative!

Don't Exaggerate

- "A future GO", "will be the best BDE CDR" (LT)
- "One of the bright young officers upon who's shoulders the future of Army Aviat
- "In fact, skip CPT and promote to MAJOR." (LT)
- "If I could prove it _____ is a LTC disguised as a LT."
- "Always promote and school early."

Don't Be Frivol

- "Eats taskings like candy."
- "WIZARD of the GREAT NORTH."
- "Gleam in his eye, fire in his belly."
- "One of the top four studs in the BN."
- "Midas touch of gold."
- "This one officer justifies every dollar spent on re

Don't say:

Concur with rater,

6+ Officer

Don't Be Stupid

- Job description on 3 month OER "Military liaison for Santa's Workshop."
- Check spelling ("top knotch, Ttrainer, wirter, Lieuteriants, assigne").
- "He is ready to lead a platoon, promote to CPT."
- "Concur w/rater." "The rater has said it all."
- "Top 1% of all MAJs in the Army (marked Center of Mass) (large profile)
- "This LT is one of the top 2 I rate in the Bn." (rates 2)
- "Clearly in the top 5% of the LTs I rate." (small population)

What Selection Board Members have to say about narratives . . . (1 of 2)

- - “Given that the senior rater ratings are now masked for captains, it is imperative that raters and senior raters use clear, quantifiable descriptions in their comments for both in and above the zone and below the zone selections.”
- - The current OER system works, especially the senior rater profile. Still, the Army must encourage, or impose, discipline on senior rater narratives. We saw an emerging trend where senior raters attempt to circumvent the strict requirements for an ACOM block check through unsubstantiated quantitative statements in COM narratives, and vice-versa. Inflated narratives could dilute the clear message of superior performance conveyed by an ACOM report in the future.”
- - “Senior raters invariably have the most influence in how the board judges an individual officer’s performance. Those senior raters who were clear in identifying not only those officers with great potential and performance, but also, substandard performance or officers possessing limited potential and poor performance of duty greatly enhanced the selection process.”

What Selection Board Members have to say about narratives . . . (2 of 2)

- - “Raters and senior raters must clearly and concisely quantify and qualify an officer’s potential and performance. Those raters that did both enhanced the selection process for top performers. Senior rater comments lose credibility when they state that an officer is the best or is in the top percentile of officers rated and then give the officer a Center of Mass (COM) rating when they have a mature profile. Senior raters also lose credibility when they state that an officer should be promoted below the zone followed by sequential COM ratings with a mature profile.”
- - “Senior Rater comments on performance often did not match the block check. For example, Senior Rater states, “best Major in this Brigade”, with a COM block check and does not have a supporting immature profile or senior rater explanation. Also, promotion potential recommendations did not always match Future Duty Assignment recommendations. These examples may degrade the credibility of the OER system and indicate a lack of candid developmental counseling.”

Additional Resources for Rating Officials

- OER Policy:
  - AR 623-3, Evaluation Reporting System
  - DA Pam 623-3, Evaluation Reporting System
- More information on SR Narrative and Box Check
  - PCC (Pre-Command Course) brief on Evals Website https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/active/TAGD/MSD/OER_Branch/OER_Main.htm
- Evaluation Systems Office, Human Resources Command:
  - Policy: (703) 325-9660 (DSN: 221), tapcmse@conus.army.mil